# Amended ethics filing shows Dennis Kucinich was paid $20k by pro-Syrian government group

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Dennis Kucinich in the Cleveland suburb of Middleburg Heights during his gubernatorial candidacy announcement. After initially not disclosing who he gave paid speeches to, Kucinich amended an ethics filing to show he received payment from a group sympathetic to the Syrian government. (Joshua Gunter, cleveland.com)

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By Seth A. Richardson, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio - After initially not disclosing who paid him to give speeches in 2017, former U.S. Rep. Dennis Kucinich filed an amended ethics disclosure showing he was paid $20,000 by a group sympathetic to the Syrian government.

Syria's President Bashar Assad has been accused by multiple intelligence agencies of using chemical weapons on his own people in the long-running Syrian Civil War.

The revelation comes when Kucinich has been dogged by his connection to Assad, whom he met with in 2017, in the gubernatorial race. Kucinich, a longtime critic of American involvement with foreign conflict, has questioned whether Assad used chemical weapons.

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Kucinich's ethics filing shows a payment of $20,000 from the Association for Investment in Popular Action Committees. Paul LaRudee, treasurer for the organization, described the group as an umbrella nonprofit for other nonprofit organizations.

Among those is the Syria Solidarity Movement, which LaRudee said provided funding for Kucinich to attend a conference hosted by the European Centre for the Study of Extremism in London on April 5-6, 2017.

LaRudee described the group as a human rights organization, but the group's website includes multiple posts supportive of the Syrian government.

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"Corporate media propaganda against Syria is an avalanche that never seems to end," one of the posts reads. "Government policy and media policy are now melded into a single policy of support for 'the opposition' and unceasing hostility towards 'the regime' and all those who have come to its aid, especially Russia."

The post goes on to describe "hysteria in the U.S. over alleged and completely unproven Russian interference in the U.S. elections" as a reason for U.S. involvement in the region.

The London trip Kucinich took was hosted by the European Centre for the Study of Extremism. The founding director of EuroCSE is Makram Khoury-Machool, who The Telegraph described as a close friend of the last Syrian ambassador to Britain.

Baroness Caroline Cox and Lord Hylton, both Assad sympathizers and members of British Parliament, spoke at the event. Cox and Hylton - like Kucinich - both visited Assad during the Syrian Civil War.

Other speakers, according to a tweet from Kucinich, included Syrian Minister of Tourism Bishr Yazigi and Ali Haider, the Syrian minister for national reconciliation who is under U.S. sanctions.

Kucinich has largely dodged questions about Assad during the gubernatorial campaign, instead saying he wanted to focus on Ohio.

After news of the latest chemical weapons attack and the U.S. strike that followed, Kucinich put out a statement critical of President Donald Trump for launching missiles into the Middle Eastern country.

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"Certainly, the culprits responsible for the gas attack on Douma need to be identified and brought to justice. But last night's missile strike occurs as a violation of international law at precisely the time when international law must be enforced on behalf of the victims of Douma," Kucinich said in the statement. "It is noteworthy that those responsible for the gas attack have yet to be identified. We are not free to

bomb in retaliation based on suspicion. It's a daft way to use the US military, particularly when we have troops in the region."

Kucinich said in a statement the London summit was a peace conference with humanitarian activists. He said the Syria Solidarity Movement was a civil rights advocacy group.

Kucinich also laid blame for the Tuesday news about his speech on the campaign of gubernatorial primary challenger Richard Cordray.

"Today, the Cordray campaign unleashed a series of attacks attempting to tie me to the Kremlin's payroll, to 911 deniers, and to the murder of innocents in the Middle East," Kucinich said. "These cowardly, hysterical and outrageously untrue statements reflect Cordray's panic that he and the State Capitol power-brokers might lose control of the Ohio Democratic Party and the statehouse."

A Cordray supporter filed a complaint with the ethics board Tuesday over the lack of reporting on who paid for the speeches. The complaint made several other claims, but did not mention the any of the connections to pro-Syrian government groups.

The Cordray campaign declined to comment.

Kucinich also released his speech he gave at the conference. In it, he criticized "an authoritarian regime" for meeting legitimate protests with resistance -- though did not name Assad.

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But Kucinich laid blame for the escalation of the Syrian Civil War on outside actors.

"Syria had long held a tradition of pluralism, wherein Christians, Jews and Muslims of all sects, as well as various ethnicities could live, work and worship freely without fear of persecution, under the protection of the government," the speech reads. "The introduction of armed religious extremists to Syria, supported by foreign powers, shattered religious harmony and set the stage for rampant intolerance and murderous attacks."

The Association for Investment in Popular Action Committees is headed up by LaRudee and Kamal Obeid. Obeid said he was a member of Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth.

The Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth is a truther organization. Obeid has given talks claiming 7 World Trade Center's collapse was a controlled demolition.

Obeid said he had never met Kucinich.